

THE HARP

(By Van Veachton Rogers)

The harp, apart from its graceful shape, rendering it literally "a thing of beauty," has a unique history of its own extending back into the remotest ages. Indeed no other musical instrument is at once so linked with the past, as is the harp. Extract from lecture by Mr. Louis Eliason: "And now a word about the harp. It comes from the addition of one extra string to a bow, and is the most ancient instrument. The harp is used as the type of heavenly music, not for its tone color, but because it was the best developed instrument at the time the Bible was written."

All except Wagner have pictured heaven with harps. He used the high notes of the violin. The harp was known to the Hebrews at the time of the earliest prophets. It is found in primitive form upon the Egyptian monuments, dating as far back as 2,000 B. C.

The first mention we have of the instrument is in holy writ where we

are told, when the sacred penman is enumerating the posterity of Cain, that Jubal, the sixth descendant from Cain is called "the father of all such as handle the harp and organ." Gen. 4:21.

The harp associated with David and the Psalms. "Above the couch of David, according to Rabbinical tradition, there hung a harp. The mid-night breeze, as it rippled over the strings, made such music that the poet-king was constrained to rise from his bed, and till the dawn flushed the eastern skies, he wedded words to the strains. The poetry of that tradition is condensed in the saying that the book of Psalms contains the whole music of the heart of man, swept by the hand of his maker. In it are gathered the lyrical burst of his tenderness, the moan of his penitence, the pathos of his sorrow, the triumph of his victory, the despair of his defeat, the firmness of his confidence, the rapture of his assured hope.

Gleanings from the History of Music (By Joseph Bird, 1850.)

The traveler, James Bruce, found in a cave in a mountain near Thebes, a painting, upon which was a harp,

which for beauty of form and finish, would compare favorably with those which are made at the present time. As this is curious and important, he may tell his own story.

"Behind the ruins of the Egyptian Thebes, and a little northwest of it, are a number of mountains hollowed into monstrous caverns; the sepulchres, according to tradition, of the first kings of Thebes. The largest contains a large sarcophagus of granite, of which the lid only is broken. In the entrance of the passage which leads sloping gently down into the chamber, there are two panels, one on each side. On that on the right is the figure supposed to have been the hieroglyphic of immortality. At the end of the passage, on the left hand, is the picture of a man playing upon the harp, painted in fresco and quite entire. His left hand seems employed on the upper part of the instrument, among the notes in alto, as if in arpeggio, while stooping forward, he seems with his right hand to be beginning with the lowest string. If we allow the performer to be about five feet ten inches, then we may compute the harp to be a little less than six feet and a half. It seems to support itself on its base, and needs only the guidance of the player to keep it steady. It has thirteen strings. It is of much more elegant form than the Grecian harp. It wants the fore piece of the frame, opposite the longest string, which must have improved its tone, but must have rendered it weaker and more liable to accidents, if carriage had not been so convenient in Egypt. The back part is the sounding board, composed of four thin pieces of wood joined together in form of a cone; that is, growing wider towards the bottom, so that as the length of the string increases, the square of the correspondent space of the sounding board, in which the tone is to undulate, increases in proportion. The ornamental parts are executed in the best manner. The bottom and sides of the frame seemed to be veneered, or inlaid, probably with ivory, tortoise shell and mother of pearl. It would even now be impossible to finish an instrument with more taste and elegance. Besides the elegance of its outward form, we must observe likewise how near it approached to a perfect instrument; for it wanted only two strings of having two complete octaves in compass. I look upon this instrument then as the Theban harp before and at the time of Sesistris, who adorned Thebes, and perhaps caused it to be painted there, as well as the other figures, in the tomb of his father."

Of this harp Burney says: "I have now to speak of the Theban harp, the most curious and beautiful of all the ancient instruments that have come to my knowledge. The number of strings, the size and form of the instrument, and the elegance of its ornament, awaken reflections which to indulge would lead me too far from my original inquiries, and indeed out of my depth. The mind is wholly lost in the antiquity of the painting in which it is represented; indeed the time is so remote as to encourage the belief that arts, after having been brought to great perfection, were again lost and again invented long before this period; and there can be no doubt but that human knowledge and refinements have shared the same fate as the kingdoms in which they were cultivated. It seems a matter of great wonder that, with such a model before their eyes as the Theban harp, the form and use of such an instrument should not have been perpetuated by posterity, but that many ages after, another and of an inferior kind, with fewer strings, should take the place of it."

The "evil spirit" Dr. Burney calls

insanity, and it may be inferred that music was a remedy for that disease.

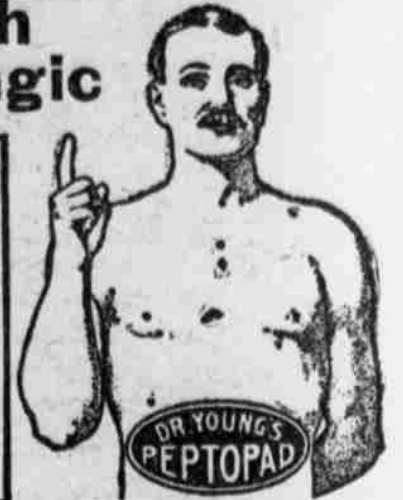
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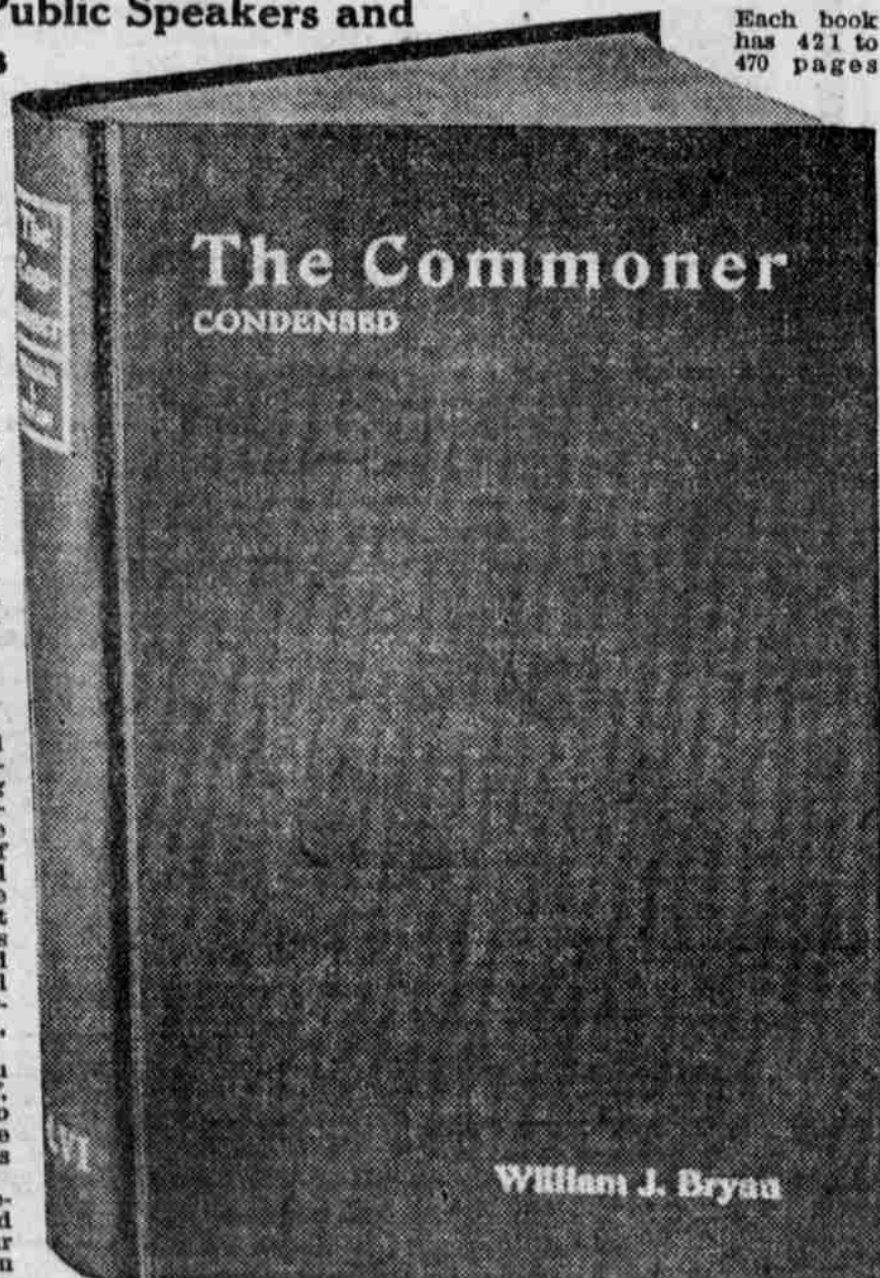
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